

Free school meals for all pupils

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Medi 2021
Petitions Committee | 13 September 2021

Reference: RS21/0497-8

Petition Number: P-06-1178

Petition title: Free school meals for all pupils in Wales

Text of petition: We call upon Welsh Government to immediately

- Amend the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals so that any child in any family receiving Universal Credit or equivalent benefit is eligible.
- Permanently extend free school meal entitlements to families with no recourse to public funds
- Introduce universal infant free school meals across Wales

As the first step towards implementing universal provision of nutritious free school meals for all school-aged children in Wales.



1. Campaign to extend eligibility criteria and the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

The issue of eligibility for free school meals (FSM) has received considerable attention in the past year and a half, partly as a result of the pandemic. The Welsh Government has provided funding during the pandemic to enable local authorities to continue providing FSM during school holidays. This will run up to Easter 2022.

There has been a campaign to extend FSM eligibility to all pupils living in families receiving Universal Credit and potentially to all pupils. Both the Child Poverty Action Group (briefing October/December 2020 and report, August 2021) and the Bevan Foundation (costs and practical considerations) have published reports on this.

The purpose of free school meals is mainly two-fold. Firstly, to avoid financial hardship on families and provide children with a meal whose family cannot easily afford it, and secondly to support their educational outcomes. Evidence is relatively mixed in terms of the benefits of FSM on educational attainment, as this 'Full Fact' article from 2017 explains.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2021-26 includes a commitment to:

Continue to meet the rise in demand for Free School Meals resulting from the pandemic and review the eligibility criteria, extending entitlement as far as resources allow.

The Minister's letter says that this **review has now commenced**, with work underway to gather data and set out its structure and scope, and consideration of research and evidence. The Minister told the Senedd on 14 July that he **expects the review to be completed in the autumn**, and will provide an update to Members at the beginning of the new Senedd term in September.

In relation to WQ81850, the then Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, published some estimated costs of extending FSM eligibility to all children in households receiving Universal Credit, as well to all primary school pupils. These were based on 2020 FSM numbers (note that these have increased in 2021).

3. Welsh Parliament action

There was a Plaid Cymru-led debate on free school meals in [Plenary on 14 July 2021](#)

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